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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (09/03): Palestinians continue to state settlement freeze is essential for moving the peace process forward

Main Stories:

All dailies report on President Barack Obama's Iftar in the White House on September 1. The local press highlights Obama's remarks about his respect for Islam and the Muslim world. The dailies quote President Obama saying that Islam is a religion that is committed to "justice and progress" and stressed that US relations with the Muslim world have to be based on "mutual interest and mutual respect."

The dailies front page news on the anticipated trilateral meeting between President Obama, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly meetings later this month. Al-Ayyam reports on President Abbas reiterating to the press during his meeting with the Spanish Prime Minister Jos Luis Zapatero in Madrid on September 2 that freezing settlement activity is a crucial obligation for Israel to fulfill prior to holding the meeting.

Al-Quds leads with news citing DPA on Hamas leaders stressing that German mediation efforts for a prisoners exchange deal between Hamas and Israel are serious and constructive. Senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouq is quoted as saying that the negotiations about the deal are moving forward. Abu Marzouq also said that he is not optimistic about the outcome of national dialogue talks scheduled for next week between Hamas and Fatah to end the internal Palestinian division, according to coverage.

Al-Quds front pages news on Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh announcing

that Hamas will not accept President Abbas' decision to hold presidential and legislative elections in the West Bank, noting that the elections have to be based on internal consensus and not imposed from an external party.

The local press highlights the meeting that took place in Jerusalem on September 2 between the PA Minister of Economy Bassem Khoury and the Israeli Regional Development Minister Silvan Shalom, the first cabinet-level meeting since Prime Minister Netanyahu took office. Palestinian Authority Presidency Spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudeina noted that the meeting focused on economic issues and had nothing to do with the political negotiations. -----

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Randa Taqi Al-Deen opines in Al-Quds independent daily under the title "The Israeli obstacles facing the international peace conference" (09/03): "Hosting an international peace conference to achieve peace in the region before the end of the year will be a very difficult task. The Israeli actions on the ground, including its refusal to freeze settlement activity ... will derail all international and regional efforts."

2) Abdallah Awwad opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the headline "Development towards transition" (09/03): "Although the international community supports an independent Palestinian state, the question remains whether this pressure will force Israel to halt all settlement activity or will it be overtaken by new agreements?"

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